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DARE: An Investment in the Future

As Mayor, one of the enjoyable duties I get to perform is attending and speaking at the DARE graduations in our elementary schools. DARE stands for "Drug Abuse Resistance Education" and includes a 10-week program taught to all fifth-grade students in Murray each year by the Murray Police Department. I am always impressed by the bond that the students build with Officer Rebecka Cox, our current DARE program manager, during the short time that she spends with them. During the past year Officer Cox taught 25 classes in nine schools, reaching 560 students. Each of these students wrote an essay at the end of the course explaining what they learned and what impressed them about the course. Selected essays are read at the DARE graduation programs by the students.

The DARE curriculum is much more than drug abuse resistance training. In addition to drug, alcohol, and tobacco education, Officer Cox instructs the students regarding self-awareness and management, responsible decision making, relationship and communication skills, as well as handling responsibilities and challenges. These lessons offer a variety of interactive, role playing and cooperative learning activities which are designed to encourage students to solve problems of major importance in their lives.

In November 2017, the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis released a 125-page report containing recommendations to combat the addiction crisis in America. The report states in part that *"substance abuse prevention is a process which requires a shift in behavior, culture, and community norms... When evidence-based programs are selected for specific populations and implemented with fidelity, they can be effective... School programs implementing environmental approaches targeting children focus on building a repertoire of positive competencies, including in the areas of academics, self-regulation, and social skills."*



As a proud supporter of DARE, I believe that this curriculum is one that meets the objectives of the President's Commission in battling the epidemic. While there have been critics over the years that have made the argument that the success of DARE is not measurable, I believe that any and all efforts that we can make in educating children can be nothing but positive. I like to tell the students at the DARE graduation that we are counting on them to make good decisions, as they are the future leaders of our communities. I consider DARE to be an investment in the future.

I appreciate the school administrators and teachers in the Murray and Granite School Districts for allowing us the time in their busy school schedules to present DARE. I believe they also recognize the value of this program. I also want to give a "shout-out" to Miss Murray (currently Sarah Nelson) for attending and speaking at the graduations as her schedule allows. The students are always mesmerized by her, and she delivers an important message to the students as well.

At the conclusion of each graduation, I have the honor of administering the "DARE Oath" to the students to "make it official." Each student raises their right arm to the square and promises to live by the principles they learned. After each graduation program as I watch the students swarm to Officer Cox to thank her, some with a big hug and even some tears, I can't help but wonder what the long term impact will be from the work that has gone into the program. If we provided some tools to help make a positive change in the lives of even a few of our students, wasn't it worth it? I think so.